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IMPROVISATION AS A STRUCTURAL METHOD OF COMPOSITION

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The musical world divides artistic practices into three main categories: composing, performing, and improvising (Borgdorff, 2007). Correspondingly, music programs offered in higher education around the world draw similar distinctions, often dividing students up into “composers” and “performers”, and largely excluding “improvisation” (Lebler 2010). Indeed, it is not unusual for degree programs to place a strong emphasis on the specialization in particular subjects, with some institutions even requiring students to ignore the rest of the musical world in order to succeed (Leech-Wilkinson 2020). An educational phenomenon often attributed to musicians' limited career opportunities, academic certification requirements, a focus on monocultural educational profiles, and an emphasis on western classical music genres (Isbell 2007; Kruse 2015).

Borgdorff (2007) attempts to expand the music taxonomy by offering a fourth category, “hybrid activities”, because it can be challenging to discern between composition, performance, and improvisation, particularly in contemporary music. Nevertheless, be it two, three, or four groupings, such classifications are arbitrary and have helped perpetuate the myth that composition entails the development of a higher level of artistic expression compared to improvisation. Such subversion has undermined improvisation to the point that it has been perceived as not being able to achieve the same level of excellence (Gioia 1988), nor be part of the composition itself. Also, composers usually “prefer performers to limit their improvise contribution, to be as accurate as possible towards instructions given to them” (Bailey, 1980: 116).

Urging to break away from this limiting composer-improviser binary and recognizing the shift in attitudes, Hamilton (2000: 195) states that “it would be wrong to give the impression that improvisers and composers are in two mutually uncomprehending camps; this no longer reflects the situation on the ground.” Rather than discerning between practices and propagating this artificial subdivision in current musical worlds, musical creation should be viewed as a continuum, in which improvisation is an inherent component of all musical activities (Bailey 1980), including composition and performance. This is illustrated by the fact that outstanding and world-renowned musicians, including Tyshawn Sorey, Ambrose Akinmusire, Guillermo Klein, Ryuichi Sakamoto, possess a solid grasp of all three components of music practice.

The motivation for this research stems from a drive to underscore the importance of music being “composed” during the performances before it is finished. This is highly significant because the knowledge that it will not sound the same the next time it is performed generates excitement. Furthermore, it offers the opportunity to interactively affect how a work is ultimately interpreted in real-time while simultaneously conveying the intended energy to performers and audiences. For example, improvisation allows musicians to positively respond to the circumstances of the moment. It could be a specific issue with the space (wanted or unwanted) that alters the possibilities of the written piece, or it could be a personal issue (emotional or physical) that alters a musician’s capacity and perception of what needs to be done, or it could be as simple as being willing to explore the possibilities within the moment of performance.

Attempting to produce a positive outcome from both seemingly unpromising and promising conditions, regardless of those being consciously provoked or randomly occurring, improvisation gives musicians tools towards a positive and “spontaneous response to

contingencies of performance or production” (Hamilton 2020: 290). Indeed, improvisation requires a willingness to take risks and explore new possibilities, while also remaining attentive to the responses of other participants in the musical dialogue (Benson 2003). Such benefits of improvisation to the performance and composition of a piece make it difficult to comprehend why its dissection from music practice has occurred. As Coleman (2022) highlights, “why should we choose to focus on one aspect of the music spectrum or another, you can make the same mistakes either way.”

It is in this context that this dissertation is situated...

This dissertation will demonstrate how improvisation can be employed as a structural route to composition. To achieve this, it will investigate the uniqueness of improvisation and composition concepts in order to rebuild and enhance their compatibility as two branches of music practice. In doing so it will then go on to argue that improvisation is not simply an optional methodology for composition, but, in fact, an unavoidable condition of every musical practice. Through this process, the deprecation improvisation of will be challenged, elevating improvisation as a method of and inherent part of composition.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. Section one outlines the historic context to set where the improvisation-composition dichotomy currently stands. Following this, key concepts surrounding the aforementioned dichotomy will be discussed: (1) historical context. (2) what constitutes a musical work: (3) what is conceived as narrow and broad sense in music: (4) control and chaos: the aesthetics of perfection and imperfection, and (5) originality, spontaneity and structure as broad concerns that impact my practice.

Section two focuses on the practical use of improvisation as a structural method of composition for my own pieces for large jazz ensembles. It begins with the methodology and methodological considerations, followed by the data collection and its analysis are described through the (1) brief analysis of Sorey, Klein, Akinmusire and Sakamoto’s work towards improvisation within composition; (2) the composition’s completion, (3) the rehearsal and practice process; and (4) the performance and performers’ feedback. Afterwards, the main compositional works will be presented. This section concludes with a discussion that synthesizes the findings and limitations gathered through section two.

Finally, this dissertation outlines future implications and educational possibilities before offering an overall conclusion.

## **2.1 IMPROVISATION – COMPOSITION DICOTHOMY**

“They are opposed concepts ... the one spontaneous, the other calculated; the one primitive, the other sophisticated; the one natural, the other artificial” (Nettl, B. 1974: 4)

This mid-20<sup>th</sup> century simplistic notion of opposites, where improvisation is designed to generate spontaneity while composition elicit order, where the former is primitive and the latter sophisticated, instead of perceiving them as parts of the same continuum, is widely accepted in the current musical culture. Nevertheless, Nettl’s ideology is easily debunked considering the requirement for a thorough understanding of broad musical concepts such as rhythm, timbre, time, intonation, articulation, forms, and so on, not just as a composer, but also to perform and improvise.

Benson (2003) for the contrary, argues that improvisation is not simply a lesser form of musical activity, but rather a unique mode of musical expression with its own distinctive qualities.

suggesting that improvisation can be seen as a form of dialogue between musicians, in which they listen and respond to one another in real time. Unlike composition, which is typically a solitary activity, improvisation requires a group of musicians who are attuned to each other's playing and can respond quickly to the unexpected. Although Benson's approach seems convincing, overemphasizing the social-cultural components over the musical ones may result in overlooking improvisation's technical and aesthetic components, which are equally important in understanding what makes it unique as a musical form.

### 2.1.2 Historical context

Considering that our perception on the matter has always been rather limited and shaped by a western point of view. For better or worse, and with the pretention of giving a proper background on the subject, I will focus on a European understanding of musical heritage, that pays scant attention to what was happening outside of itself, often labeling the rest of musical cultures as improvised, as in a negative and unprepared manner (Treitler 1991).

Classical music has been notoriously suspicious of improvisation, often considering it as a lower form of musical activity, lacking the depth and complexity of composed music. Other musical traditions, however, have long recognized the importance of improvisation and have even made it the focus of their musical practices (Benson 2003).

As Hamilton (2020) will put it, before the written specialization of music production, before the appearance of music 'work' (written scores), a concept that appeared much earlier in literature, all musicians were performers of their own work, improvisers within their own musical spectrum, and perhaps that of others-troubadours might even have played each other's songs.

After the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century the composer evolved into a desk worker, more than just a performer and improviser, where the composition starting to be defined by the score, by this new "work concept". And with new possibilities of representation and reproduction, notation transcended its mnemonic origins and evolved into the modernist era of 'brilliance' compositions.

At the same time, during this process, improvisation continued as a common feature of both musical instruction and performance, with renowned instances being Bach's *Fugue Improvisations*, live improvisations by the *Basso Continuo*, or the appearance of *Concerto Cadenzas* that were a model of freedom for soloist within classical improvisation, with the artist improvising a piece before the closing coda. This tradition continued towards early nineteenth-century Europe, where professional keyboard players and composers and many amateurs were trained to improvise (Hamilton 2022).

As composers' authority grew after the mid-nineteenth century, and their compositions became more complex, a romantic *ideal* of improvisation or in other words, written cadenzas by irritated composers with performers-improvisers who badly modify their pieces, supplanted improvisation in public performance.

Some argue that with the appearance of this *Aesthetic Canon* alongside the evolution of the compositions towards more intricate and complex structures during the romantic period, the integrity of the musical work became too complex for spontaneous improvisation, which could explain the decline of improvisation during performances and the demise of performers' improvised cadenzas (Gould and Keaton 2000). After all, classical musicians, up

to the present, continued to improvise in the organ loft, in schools, and for dancers' activities underrecognized and underappreciated, while "improvisation" acquired pejorative connotations of lack of discipline or planning, that at least, is the familiar story (Hamilton 2000).

The connection between improvisation and composition has altered and evolved over time. From being viewed as a critical technique for performing virtuosi into the nineteenth century, to being generally rejected throughout the twentieth century, as a type of craft in comparison to the art of composition. The conflicting viewpoints of Busoni and Schoenberg in early 20<sup>th</sup> century exemplify the paradox. While the former (in Davisson 2022) defended the spontaneity that is essential to improvisation during the performer's contribution to music, the latter praised the well-planned skill of composition in order to create works. Schoenberg considered musical compositions to be universals or kinds, whereas improvisation had a lesser existence. Busoni's humanistic emphasis on the moment of performance was perfectly contrasted by the idealism musical Platonism of Schoenberg.

### **2.1.3 Musical 'work'**

Hamilton (2000) describes that before the musical *work-concept* attained hegemony, a process of increasing specificity of the score that was finished during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the dichotomy between improvisation and composition was rooted in historical circumstance and lacked its present meaning, or perhaps any meaning at all. "By 1800 . . . the notion of extemporization acquired its modern understanding [and] was seen to stand in strict opposition to "composition" proper" (Goehr 1992: 234)

According to Davies (2001), a musical work is a recording, text or score that serves as a blueprint for the execution of a musical performance. Recently, he added the concept of work-performance into the equation, although not every musical performance is a work.

While it is possible (to some degree) to freely improvise music, which is a fundamental aspect of many Indigenous music and dance traditions as well as some jazz styles, when jazz musicians improvise, their ideas may start with a recognizable thematic kernel known as the head. What occurs is a "free work" after or inspired by that tune rather than a performance of a piece associated with that melody. At times, the improvisation is purposefully more confined, for instance by adhering to the original chord progression, but once more, it is not immediately apparent why this should mark what is done as a work-performance (Davies 2020). He argues then that to qualify as a work-performance you could do it with improvisational repetitions, or the concept of keep on building on the same improvisation idea during a series of performances, till the extent that it becomes "fixed". What aligns with Finkelstein's (1948: 111) view, where "the ability to write music makes possible a bigness of form and richness of expression that is beyond the limits of improvisation ... [But the] slow creation of a great jazz solo [from performance to performance] is a form of musical composition".

However, this approach does not adequately account for the role of improvisation in the creation of music. Improvisation is a central element of many musical traditions, and it is often considered an essential part of the compositional process.

While the requirement of being notated or recorded enhance the ability to be accurately reproduced, what obviously offers a viable route towards ownership and monetization This viewpoint of musical 'work' where only compositions with a definite and premeditated framework can be referred to as "real" music, might be perceived as constricting since it

ignores the artistry and creativity inherent in the improvised music's formation. "Improvisation requires a high degree of musical skill and knowledge, as well as the ability to remain open to the creative possibilities that emerge through the process of dialogue" (Benson 2003: 7).

A more acute and personal question would be, where does composition start and improvisation finish? or, does not every first step of musical composition also carry improvisation, does not mostly every composition need to be performed? And then, how can we even determine by notation if a composition is finished or not without considering the work's performance or audience response?

Written music is inevitably modified by performance; performance is unavoidably altered by improvisation, which is transformed by the audience, who, constitutes an important component of the musical conversation by reacting to and pushing the music through their responses (Benson 2003).

I could strive to recreate this sort of "perfection" as understood in the form of notated compositions, but if I wish for my music to be performed and listened to by others, having the impromptu of their own hands in the outcome of my work is inexorable. I intend to embrace "mistakes" as opportunities of eliciting surprise and convey energy.

"A finished composition [is] fixed on the page. But the resulting performance will always have the by-hand-ness quality" (Linda Catlin Smith in Hamilton 2020: 298)

#### **2.1.4 Broad & narrow sense**

Adding some extra fire into this already blurry conceptualization of musical work, this dichotomy between composition and improvisation, there is Hamilton's (2020) aim to classify composition and improvisation into two main categories: 'narrow' and 'broad'. While composition in the narrow sense refers to produced works, generally meaning written notation or recorded productions, in the broader sense it refers to bringing things together in an aesthetically pleasing fashion. But he goes on to say that improvisation can be a method of (broad sense) composition; after all, there is no music that is not created in a broad sense (Hamilton 2020). Yet, it is plausible that not all music will be composed with the intention of being aesthetically acceptable, or that a lack of specialized knowledge would make distinguishing between what is and is not aesthetically pleasing difficult. If there is no music that is not created in a wide sense, why do we continue to strive to classify and categorize all musical activities in order of importance?

Personally, the relevance to generate a framework, regardless its amount of previously fixated information, where the performers and improvisers have freedom to contribute to the outcome of the musical piece, while still being faithful to the piece's main idea, overpass any aesthetic ideal. "A score can be considered the recipe for possible music-making... taking into account that as it does much more than the composer" (Earle Brown in Bailey 1980: 97).

Acknowledging the importance of performers contributions, often misrepresented as "imperfections", towards the result of the composition and, the unavoidability of personality input during performances, and for extension a certain degree of improvisation, even when there are not specific improvised parts during the piece, helped me embracing the surprises that might be created by the "*chaos*" elicit through improvisation, and, to an extent, consciously create the recipe to celebrate those moments.



“Improvisation must be present in any realization of a musical entity and will differ only in the musical materials that are improvised, and to the extent improvisation is used to bring them” (Gould & Keaton 2000: 147)

### **3.1 CONTROL & CHAOS (Aesthetics of Perfection & Imperfection)**

We have outlined, that over the past two centuries, composition has been identified with *control*, with a ‘well-planned’ artistic methodology around notated musical scores, while *chaos* has been associated with improvisation, making it seem like they are two completely different entities, where improvisation is merely a careless and unpolished language of musical expression, reflecting the absence of performers preparation in comparison to the genius and structure of composed music. George Lewis (2019) points out that, western composers have had an ongoing narrative of dismissal of improvisation ever since 1800. A narrative in which an imperfectionist aesthetic, connected to improvisation, opposes a perfectionist aesthetic, connected to the work-concept (Hamilton 2000).

A sort of original view on this aesthetic dichotomy comes from Ted Gioia’s understanding of improvisation as doomed, something that offers a pale imitation of the perfection attained by composed music. The use of improvisation will allow mistakes to seep in, both in form and execution; the improviser, if he honestly tries to be creative, will push himself into expressive realms that his technique might not be able to manage. “Too often the finished product will show moments of rare beauty intermixed with technical mistakes and aimless passages. Why then are we interested in this haphazard art?” (Gioia 1988: 66).

Anxious to understand why we are still interested in the “imperfect art” of improvisation. Gioia determines what defines “the aesthetics of perfection”, which uses composition as the paradigm, in opposition of the “the aesthetics of imperfection” (Hamilton 2000).

To interlace these aesthetics concepts with the matter of chaos and control, we could refer to Schoenberg, A. (the compositional determinist), convinced that to create masterworks, the genius composer’s autonomy was a nonnegotiable practice, which, in his view, needed the performer to be completely subservient. In contrast, Busoni, F. (the defender of spontaneity), valued improvisation and the performer-unique interpreter’s contribution (Davisson 2022).

Schoenberg’s need for control, disguised here as a desire of coherence and orchestral homogeneity, is just an attempt to control the unavoidable improvisational part of every interpretation, that small portion of chaos, regardless of the style of the music, that comes with each performer’s individuality. What matches with the opinion of modernists such as Boulez (1986: 461), “If the player were an inventor of primary forms or material, he would be a composer . . . if you do not provide him with sufficient information to perform a work, what can he do? He can only turn to information he has been given on some earlier occasion, in fact to what he has already played”.

For Olivier Messiaen (1944), the concept of chaos was an inexhaustible source of inspiration. It was not disorder, it was the underlying order that we cannot see, the order that governs the universe. Berio, L. saw chaos as an appealing concept, capable of reproducing the fragmentation and disorder that was in the world around, to elicit “surprise”. However, the

sense of ownership, as the primary creator, is difficult to abandon, and they desperately wanted to control it; no randomness-aleatory or spontaneity were allowed after the composers finished their written piece; no creativity or chance for different outcomes were expected from the performer; no wonder or embracement of chaos itself, only the appearance of it, the appearance of randomness beneath an overwritten and complex layer. As Boulez (2005) explains in his 'Leçons de Musique', there can't be a musical cosmos without law, and as a result, the performer and the listener must understand that law. I guess he assumed that the composers oversaw formulating such laws, where a limiting equilibrium between order and randomness is exploited again.

This law, this systole, has its diastole, and as the composer notes, our perception wants to feel both as though it is letting itself be carried away, wandering, by listening in which memory is abandoned, and as though it is being reaffirmed when it believes it recognizes the motives or themes that the work proposes. So, in the composer's words, "between order and chaos where there is space for the most unstable, the most volatile area, and the richest of both imagination and perception" will apply (Boulez 2005: 421).

I recognize that the pursuit of aesthetic balance is what sustains the artistic impulse between improvisation and composition, between order and chaos, between aesthetic perfection and imperfection, I tend to lean more on Hamilton's (2020) revisited opinion on the matter, where imperfections are no longer an aesthetic concept implying 'unfinished', more an opportunity to positively contribute to the unknown, to the unpredictability of interpretation.

"The aesthetics of imperfection embraces improvisation *and* composition; it is an aesthetics of *performance*" (Hamilton 2020: 291)

Regardless of whether the interpreter agrees with Busoni or Schoenberg, "there is variance in this individuality, that follows principally from the fact that classical players are interpreters of a composed work to which they must strive to be faithful" (Hamilton 2000: 175). They are expected to be less individually creative than interpreters of other musical genres such as jazz or free improvisation, where players put much more of their total personalities into what they do (Anthony pay in Bailey 1980: 87). And, if we talk about genres, there could be a rather large aesthetic contrasts between specialized improvisers and performers. "*In improvised music, instrumental timbre and instrumental technique are non-standard and more individual*" (Hamilton 2000: 174), while under the classical music standard, the yearning for individuality transforms into a desire to blend in with the collective sound.

It seems thought, that those who want to be in complete control of the musical production process are more incline towards the concept of *Aesthetic of Perfection*, where written music is the king; performers are mere vessels and interpretative 'servants' of the composer's genius. For those who want to accept chaos, embrace the nuances and unpredictability of each performance, and celebrate personality inputs by interpreters, the choice would be the *Aesthetic of Imperfection*. We could say that Busoni's imperfectionism is humanistic (focus on performance), while Schoenberg's perfectionism emphasizes timeless work.

Nevertheless, both imperfectionists and perfectionists have a similar misperception about how a work is interpreted; imperfectionists reject it as simple reproduction, while perfectionists applaud it for not tainting the performer's personality. Imperfectionists assert that interpreters only "reproduce the score," whereas perfectionists acknowledge this as a merit (Hamilton 2000).

Furthermore, there are perfectionists and imperfectionists in all disciplines of music and art, and their aesthetic approaches and contradictions are multilayer on a continuum. In some ways, those who support an aesthetics of perfection want express classical authority by disparaging more unconventional, untrained techniques, while on the other hand, true imperfectionism is a "*constant striving for new contingencies to respond to*" (Hamilton 2020: 290). Keith Jarrett, as a complex example on the matter, is an imperfectionist when it comes to spontaneous improvisation yet a perfectionist when it comes to the instrument. Others critique perfectionist improvisers who rely on the safety net of known patterns and "[strive] for a fake perfection"(Hamilton 2020: 290).

However, the improvisation and composition dichotomy is not just in the differences between aesthetics of perfection and aesthetics of imperfection, rather than in the concepts and pretensions than artist might have in regards of the concepts of process and product, permanence and impermanence of the work, and the necessity of spontaneity or deliverance (Hamilton 2000)

Even though all of this seems hazy at times, this method of blending control and chaos, structure, and flexibility, should result in compositions that are both eloquent and expressive. A challenging and critical framework that consider each musician's specific abilities, that values both individual and collective creativity.

#### **4.1 ORIGINALITY, SPONTANEITY & STRUCTURE**

"I've been playing the saxophone since I was a teenager, but I kept analyzing, I kept trying to think, what is the difference between a note and an idea?" (Ornette Coleman as in The Wire 304, June 2009).

Even if musical compositions are not totally fixed, they are frequently seen as such. At the same time the aesthetic ideal of freedom within improvisation has frequently been heralded to propose an artistic practice of spontaneity, liberated of the rigidity of the musical work. These are not facts, but rather aesthetic aspirations, yet, these values have shaped the aesthetic nature of significant musical genres, such as jazz or folk music. And yet again, reality is somewhere far from that, regardless of how innovative and free the musicians believe their music is, it will always resemble something familiar, even if that is purely due to the rules that they follow when improvising or the traditional usage of parameters such as scales, intervals, or arpeggios of our music system when performing or composing (Davisson 2022).

Carter & Boulez (in Hamilton 2000) point of view is that improvisers express themselves less than they think since so much of what they play is what they are remembering, even if they are unaware, they are recalling. Bailey adds that instinctive and calculated choices are both normally tried material, where "improvisation is hardly ever deliberately experimental" (1980: 92). Even Gadamer (1989: 129) exposes, while talking about the creative process of writers, that "free creation is always only one side of a mediation conditioned by previously established ideals for the writer".

Furthermore, Bertinetto (2013) suggests that improvisation embodies Heidegger's notion of "thrownness," or the idea that humans are always already situated within a particular context and must navigate a range of possibilities within that context. And in that context, Adorno (1976: 220) argues, "*whether and to what extend the changes in public taste are actually*

*determined by those in 'circumstances of production' or whether both are equally dependent on a third factor whose cliché is the 'changing spirit of the time'".*

It seems then, that even if one accepts that improvisation will always have a certain amount of aleatory in itself and that, any elements of a piece not expressly stated by the musical score are susceptible to some randomness created by the individuality of performers, as Davisson (2022) and Gadamer (1989) noted, it appears that any artistic practice will always be influenced by earlier aesthetic ideals, which implies that it will never be as spontaneous as one expects it to be .

Others advocate for the conception where real spontaneity only appears during improvisation. As Leo Smith (in Hamilton 2000) points out, contrary to composition, which involves having an idea in one moment, funneling it through a system of notation as merely a related idea onto paper, and then having it performed as an idea at least three times removed from the original, improvisation involves having an idea in one moment. Busoni (2003) also states, that towards compositional inspiration 'every notation is a transcription of an abstract idea. The moment the pen seizes it, the idea loses its original form...' where the improvisation's purity brings us one step closer to the source of artistic inspiration. Hence it seems reasonable to talk about the planning of the spontaneous effort.

This is the basic idea behind the assertion that improvisation is advantageous since it gets closer to the original idea (Hamilton 2000), a romanticized appealing perspective where: improvisers may produce music "out of nothing" in front of our very eyes (Davisson 2022). Or, as Lacy would say (in Hamilton 2000: 181), "there is a freshness, a certain quality that can only be obtained by improvisation, something you cannot possibly get by writing. It is something to do with the edge". Although, according to Lacy, the performance must appear to be a "leap into the unknown," and it will be motivated when the hours of practice connect with the needs of the moment and help create an original and engaging piece.

However, being closer to the original idea does not offer a conclusive explanation about the amount spontaneity and originality produce by a sporadic event or by a consciously written one, neither takes away the possibility of practicing spontaneity by studying and improving your skills.

Some go even further, asserting that the lack of practiced structures improves spontaneity and originality during improvisation. Yet, realistically, it may end providing you with the opportunity of being completely out of order. "An improviser's individuality precisely resides in, among other things, their creative development of favorite stylistic or structural devices, without which they risk incoherence and non-communication" (Hamilton 2000: 182). Gould and Keaton (2000) assert that improvisations are very often well prepared and structured prior to the performances, and contrary to popular belief, improvisation might be independent of both spontaneity and unpredictability, even if some improvised performances combine both.

According to LaMonte Young (in Hamilton 2000), there is a fine line between structure, preparation, and control, and allowing things to come through. Even though he has practiced and has a lot of material beneath his fingertips and racing through his thoughts while he plays the piano... "I totally open myself up to a higher source of inspiration and try to let it flow through me. I play things that I could've never played, that I couldn't imagine" (LaMonte Young in Hamilton 2000: 181) What again, is not the same as claiming that a lack of preparation for

improvisation is what allows for flexibility of interpretation. "Conscious or subconscious, it is clear that improvisers follow certain conventions, and convention necessitates a lack of originality, at least to an extent" (Davisson 2022: 382 - 383)

Furthermore, philosopher Bourdieu's (1990) concept of "habitus", "*learned norms that regulate behavior and thought, influence people's identity, and choices*", present the opportunity to wonder how these man-made structures affect actions in music.

Interpreters study a work to provide a real presentation of it, which implies the preparation of multiple performative structures. Improvisers, likewise, practice harmonic, melodic and rhythmic structures in order to be better prepared to react to the unexpected, and pre-constructed conventions will assist composers produce possibilities for new works on an unconscious level, to provide the audience with a sense of totality (Hamilton 2000).

Whether we're talking about composition, performance, or improvisation; structures, in their many forms, seem to provide flexibility while liberating the artist from having to choose between infinite options, risking their discourse fluency. Or as Gadamer (1989: 105) presents it: "The structure of play absorbs the player into itself and frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence".

Acknowledging there is certainly a timetable connotation where improvisers and performers do not have much opportunity to rectify errors, and therefore, must embrace a percentage of unpredictability, of chaos, in opposition to composers, prepared structures seem to have a positive impact in all three main musical practices, without harming their originality or spontaneity. What reiterates, assigning spontaneity as a fundamental property of improvisation and so distinguishing it from interpretation and composition is based on a conceptual misunderstanding. "It is to conflate the notion of spontaneity with that of fluency" (Gould and Keaton 2000: 147).

Regardless of the socio-cultural and economic reasons why improvisation and composition are not yet part of the same idiom, it seems contradictory trying to be innovative by shutting down improvisation as a viable composing method, or vice versa, disregarding composition a viable way of eliciting surprise. Composers, "in preventing performers from playing in their usual way, suggest another kind of spontaneous reaction—to the musical concepts underlying the music—which has greater potential for liveliness than is usually the case with improvisation" (Elliott Carter in Hamilton 2000: 180).

At the same time, personal practices and prior knowledge do not take away the spontaneity of discourse; neither make it predictable, just as the use of improvisation does not take away ownership over written compositions. No matter the parallels with earlier works, artists unique personality and their way of utilizing personal background, are what make their work and contributions to others, original.

## **5.1 IMPROVISATION AS A METHOD OF COMPOSITION**

Wolterstorff (in Benson 2003) asserts that composition is the act of determining the attributes that will comprise the work, the written piece. However, would that mean that creators need to blindly follow the determinations of perfectionism towards what is a "well-produce" piece of music to be considered as composers? Would that mean that improvisation can't be use as a method of composition just because perfectionists consider the written scores as the only compositional material? Additionally, when will that creative process be completed? And is it

defined solely by the composer, or should we also consider the event of the performance to establish when a piece is finished?

With a more imperfectionist viewpoint, Davisson (2022) proposes that the composing process is to a certain extent performative, so then, by extension, composition must unavoidably contain improvisation. Reinforcing this conceptualization there is Gould and Keaton's (2000: 143) perspective on the matter, where "interpretation is the player's conceptual realization of the musical score in performance, and, by necessity, interpretation involves improvisation". Considering then compositions as not totally fixed or finished by the written work, since interpretation will always change the final outcome of the piece by introducing aleatory amounts of improvisation into the equation, Davisson (2022: 377) believes that "this is improvisation being used as a method of composition or, more specifically, a crucial step in the compositional process."

As a step further, Evan Parker (in Hamilton 2000), one of the leading free improvisers, advocates 'improvisation as a compositional method', and describes his piece 'De Motu' as 'an improvisation composed uniquely and expressly during its performance in Zaal de Unie in Rotterdam on Friday May 15th, 1992'. He continues: 'in the period of preparation I made notes of ideas and patterns . . . in a method that can be seen as analogous to a painter's sketchbook where fragments of what might become the final work are treated in isolation from one another.' What aligns with Whitmer's (in Hamilton 2000) conception of compositions, as entities where the composer just merely decides when to conclude the creative pre-performative process by embracing what has already been produced, but also by understanding that there is no such thing as a finished product. "Don't look forward to a finished and complete entity. The idea must always be kept in a state of flux. An error may only be an unintentional rightness. Polishing is not at all the important things; instead strive for a rough go-ahead energy. Do not be afraid of being wrong; just be afraid of being uninteresting" (Whitmer in Hamilton 2000: 178).

By recognizing that live performances, recordings, mixing, artificial reproductions, or any other event involving interpreters may change written works in unforeseen ways, I intend to embrace a more inclusive and aesthetically open method for music production. One in which improvisation, understood as an essential performative condition, may be employed as a structural component of composition rather than as a transitory embellishment. One in which musical genres are just personal backgrounds that complement one another, rather than artificial limitations. All, aiming to find a better way to elicit energy between the performers and the audience, to add a sort of conscious adoption of spontaneity, a methodology that helps to positively respond to the unpredictable. "Improvisation adds another dimension to compositions, by bringing the musicians into a greater intensity of working on a piece" (Earle Brown in Bailey 1980: 83)

Precise criteria must be specified to ensure that the improvisation remains cohesive and fits as a structural and foundational part of the overall composition. Many paths could be taken to accomplish this, including: **a)** the use of specifically created graphic notation for a more open-ended interpretation by the performers, that can encourage improvisation and experimentation, **b)** the inclusion of solo sections allowing for each performer to showcase their individual style and interpretation of the music, **c)** the use of call-and-response sections

to create a dialogue between performers and add a dynamic element to the performance, **d**) collectively conducted improvisations, **e**) melody leading improvisation, to allow one particular interpreter to become performer and conductor at once, and of course, **f**) the general embracement of flexibility that comes by giving the opportunity to soloists and performers of interpret their parts more freely.

The fundamental concept is to be ready for improvisation to drive the composition, to take the music on an alternate path than what was originally intended, welcoming the unexpected and allowing the performers to experiment musically. Benson (2003) emphasizes the importance that in musical improvisation, the focus is not on producing a predetermined outcome, but rather on engaging in a creative exchange that shapes the music as it is being performed.

Finally, considering that personal intuition is conservative by nature, that it does not want to be challenge, that individual's memory does not root for the unknown (Boulez 2005). Creators may need to generate an external edge towards freedom of expression, and improvisation is the chosen edge against my own intuitive complacency, against my lack of originality and spontaneity of my written works, against my desire of control.

## **6.1 METHODOLOGY**

Before I started the project, I was allured to use two different qualitative research methodologies that seemed suitable for exploring the improvisation-composition dichotomy. These approaches were: **a**) music analysis and commentary analysis using content and grounded theory approaches (Clarke and Cook 2004, Samsom 1997), and **b**) Brinkman and Kvale's (2015) phenomenological interviewing structure. The first methodology offered a way to analyze music beyond the written score, that included the performance itself and the perspective of the performer. The second methodology focused on conducting interviews with interviewees to gain a deeper understanding of *what* is experienced. Although conducting a qualitative interview has various limitations and problems, if done correctly, Brinkman and Kvale's (2015) phenomenological interviewing format might offer significant and unique insights from artists that would otherwise be unachievable.

Unfortunately, given that the practical length of this thesis does not allow me to delve deeply into the worlds of the principal artists I consider to be currently doing outstanding work in bringing improvisation into composition, in interlacing both musical practices as one interconnected and thoughtful continuum, nor conduct phenomenological interviews with a large enough group of participants to make the data collected relevant. I decided to focus on my own and more holistic version of music analysis, the discoveries of which I will use as models for my own compositions, alongside commentary analysis.

### **6.1.1 Methodological Considerations**

To provide context for where and how I approached this section of the project, I intend to describe the methods I utilized, by briefly considering the lengthy history of music analysis.

Theoretical analyses, like as structuralism and Schenkerian, frequently ignore the proficiency of performers, emphasizing not just the composers above the performers, but arguing that there is not space for interpretations during performances that do not breathe from within the written work (Schenker in Cook 1999), what also seems to dismiss almost at will the relevance of improvisation. As Cook (1999: 242) laments, "music theorists, perhaps, they explain music without musicians." Similar to this, the study of analysis and performance

as a branch of music theory comes across as yet another attempt to minimize the musician in favor of the analysis, as if only the theoretical aspect of analysis can shed light on performance practice (Cook 1999). Cook (1999: 252-253) explains this perfectly, by using David Lewin words, "analysis is not an aid to perception, or to the memory of perception; rather, we are in the very act of perceiving." For this reason, music analysts began to search for a more holistic approach, one that also took into consideration the performer.

"The thoughts of musicians concerning their own creative activities must be taken very seriously" (Lewis 2019: 10)

Although it's possible that Eric Lewis' "practical guiding principle" could merely be a convenient talking point, it gives me the chance to emphasize the value of the musician's point of view within music production. An intrinsic value that could help me prevent a reduction of the work to a narrow perspective, where scholars must evaluate not just the artists' written music, but also their recordings, performances, and live improvisations.

Cook adds, "we need to think about what our theory accomplishes as much as what it expresses" (1999: 242). This is where a holistic approach to music analysis will be critical for my research since it will allow me to methodically study scores and recordings of classical composers such as Messiaen, Boulez, or Stravinsky, in order to find balance between chaos and control. And contemporary musicians such as John Hollenbeck, Guillermo Klein, John Zorn, Peter Evans, Ambrose Akinmusire, or Tyshwan Sorey and assess the extent to which specific components of their musical language naturally occur in their artistic practices, to make improvisation and composition operate as a whole entity, a seamless structural element into their musical works.

While this technique offers useful insights into the mechanics of achieving excellence in musical composition, it only provides a partial view of what happens during performance. A more comprehensive methodology that analyses both the recording of the music and the recording of the artist's commentary on said performance will be required to assess the extent to which my compositions have achieved another level of communication and expressiveness between the interpreters and the audience. The commentary is subjected to content analysis, which reveals insights into the musician's aims, motivations, and appraisal of a performance (their own or someone else's) (Clarke, 2004).

## **7.1 DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS**

The capacity to investigate and evaluate a wide range of phenomena in music, such as artistic motivation, aesthetic intention, interpretational choices, or capacity of reaction, will be the main advantages of merging music analysis with commentary data subjected to content or grounded theory.

Additional advantages might be gained by exploring the potential for surprise generation and tension release, utilizing conventional musical parameters (form-melody-rhythm-tempo-mode-loudness) and seeing how artists react to them during improvisational events and performances.

The data gathered will be synthesized not just to obtain specific knowledge, but also to assist me in the compositional process of my own music, where structural and aesthetic characteristics will invariably shape the outcome of written works as well as the performances.



This will be followed by adding a extend range of improvisational instances at key points in the pieces, expecting to gain a clearer understanding of how surprise and chance may be elicited within musical practices.

### **7.1.2 Brief analysis of previous works (Sorey, Akinmusire, Klein & Sakamoto)**

This section will focus on shedding light on the magnificent work of four unique artists who I consider to be representatives of the richness and diversity of contemporary music, modern jazz, and improvised music scenes (supposedly independent genres that on their edges, are quite indistinguishable from one another), during the past few decades.

In doing so, I will briefly analyze the main improvisational characteristics of their compositions, trying to focus on how their music creativity have always been open towards inspiration and interpretational flexibility, and in so many ways detached from stylistic stereotypes.

Although my educational background in music is largely based on jazz heritage, and regardless of it previously been the paradigm of artistic exploration and music experimentation, I have always found difficulties in connecting my work to the wider and more standard notion of the genre. That is perhaps why, despite their allegiance to different music styles, or the divergences in their compositional methodologies, the works of *Tyshawn Sorey*, *Guillermo Klein*, *Ambrose Akinmusire*, and *Ryuichi Sakamoto* have always felt captivating.

Generally speaking, they all share a commitment to experiment and push the limits of conventional music arrangements, often featuring complex rhythmic structures, asymmetric music forms, intertwined musical genres, or unconventional harmonic constructions; what creates unexpected shifts in mood and texture.

Aiming to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their musical expertise, I will recognize not just their significant works for different large ensembles, such as: *Unorthodox Jazz Ensembles*, *Classical Ensembles*, *Jazz Big Bands* and *Symphonic Orchestras*, but also discuss their approach for smaller formations, where they bring a unique way of understanding improvisation within structure and orchestration, towards sound making and musical interactivity.

**1)** For instance, Tyshawn Sorey's recorded work has been mainly focused on small bands, yet, he has written extensively also for contemporary large ensembles such as: *International Contemporary Ensemble*, *Los Angeles Philharmonic*, *TAK Ensemble* or *The Louisville Orchestra* between others.

As a multi-instrumentalist with an extraordinary performative ability, as well as a prolific composer, Sorey provides a very fresh and openminded view towards music improvisation. Often creating a layer between free collective improvisation, musical structures, orchestration, and performative energy (see live concert at The Stone, as conductor for NYC Improvisers Orchestra) that works as a continuum between musical practices. His approach may transcend genre classifications, as his highly structured compositions within a contemporary music framework, purposefully explore improvisation and spontaneous interaction among the performers, and by doing so, he achieves a deeper method of evoking energy (see song: *Iron Spider & Paradoxical Frog*).

Being highly inspired not just by jazz tradition, but particularly by his classical music training as well as his interest in free improvisation, experimental and avant-garde music, Sorey is constantly disrupting preconceived musical paradigms with his unorthodox harmonic textures and unexpected instrumentations, a magnificent use of space, silence, iteration (see song: Permutations for Solo Piano), and sonic textures.

I personally appreciate how he incorporates unconventional orchestration into all musical genres without intended distinction (see his magnificent orchestration in the piece Soundbites – “For George Lewis”, or the exploration of electronic soundscapes in the album Tyshawn & King).

In his endeavors as a conductor (see live concert at The Banff Centre), he frequently employs his own music method of communication, with unique symbology, that overlaps traditional notation systems. Making the boundary between free improvisation, collectively controlled improvisation, and contemporary music composition so blurred that it seems impossible to tell what is written music and what isn't, or whether it really matters.

Sorey's music always left me yearning for the ability to accomplish a comparable blend of control and chaos, wondering what the point is of continuously attempting to divide improvisation and composition, as if they were opposing entities, rather than simply parts of the same musical world. **(Albums: “That / Not”, “Paradoxical Frog” & “Tyshawn and King”)**

**2)** Following, Ambrose Akinmusire's compositions are somehow the ones closer to a jazz folklore, mostly because it is perceptible that his personal improvisational language (seen song: Marie Christie), regardless how intricate and often random might seem, is very close to that tradition, in the way he reacts to what is around, and the exploration of specific instrument sonorities, blue notes and chromatic melodies.

Form and harmonic wise, he frequently crosses the boundaries between jazz, classical, and contemporary music; experimenting with the timbral potential of the bands, using unconventional instrumentation, such as: the use of spoken word and other vocal techniques in his works, or the mix of classical string quartet with a standard jazz quintet.

Marked by their expressive melodies and harmonic sophistication intertwine with multifaceted improvisations (see songs: Cynical Sideliners & Our Basement), his compositions often feature complex rhythmic structures, polyrhythmic and odd meters (see song: Tide of Hyacinth). A distinguished utilization of irregular bar structures, unexpected time signatures changes and modal harmonic exchanges that invariably affect the overall mood and texture of his works (see songs: Yesss & Vartha), creating an intricate soundscape layering where improvisation is entangled in such a way that again, as stated about Tyshawn Sorey's music, the written parts of the compositions appear to be improvised.

He is truly a master on intertwining improvisation within form, rhythmic and harmonic structures, in a very natural and cohesive manner (see song: Mr. Roscoe). **(Albums: “On the Tender Spot of Every Calloused Moment” & “The Imagined Savior is Far Easier to Paint”)**

**3)** Putting aside my personal appreciation for those musicians that use traditional folk music as obvious background inspiration for their music, it is fair to say that composer and pianist

Guillermo Klein has long been involved in the contemporary jazz community, influencing a whole new generation of improvisers and composers.

Being renowned for his intricate and challenging rhythmic arrangements, as well as for a profound love for beauty in simple melodies and modal harmonies (see songs: Manuel, Moreira & Mareados). Much of his work incorporates a mix of odd meters, amalgamas, changing time signatures (see songs: Niños, Miula, & Yeso) and new forms of using "*la clave*" (terminology for the intrinsic rhythm layer that works as the fundamental base of a lot of traditional music in Latin American folklore).

One outstanding characteristic of his compositions, that I understand is related to his previous work analyzing Argentinian Folk Songs, is the particular use of polyrhythm around the interlayering possibilities of the rhythmic 3-2 subdivisions, or the time signatures 3/4, 4/4, 6/8 and 12/8, (see songs: Burrito Hill, Blues de Liz, Volante & Va Roman).

We may define his compositions for large ensembles as a combination of South American folklore, traditional and contemporary jazz, and modernist classical musical elements (see songs: Memes & Mariana), where features of composers such as Messiaen and Stravinsky may be found in his unexpected orchestrations, harmonic modal exchanges, and even the usage of form, creating a distinctive sound that combines sophisticated polyphony and counterpoint.

His album "Live in Barcelona" is a precise modern example of how to use the individual abilities of each musician in a large ensemble to enhance the overall result of the pieces, as well as traditional solo structures that entangle perfectly with the music itself, forming an impressively aligned part of the overall compositions, without ever feeling like those parts are just an awkward interlude, or an overextended ornament. **(Albums: "Live in Barcelona" & "Filtros", & "Carrera")**

**4)** Worldly acclaimed artist, Ryuichi Sakamoto is being always understood as no-improviser (as the jazz soloist conception of the word) by training, but an interpreter eager to performing experimentation.

Mainly known for his film scoring works, whether it was by using technology, hardware such as synthesizers or electronic instruments, or software that allows him to generate randomness during performances or collaborating with other artists; Sakamoto was always looking for new ways to push the boundaries of musical communication and use interaction as a unique and original musical feature (see songs: Ghost Roads & Halo).

Admired for his musical approach towards experimentation, his collaborations with electronic artists such as Alva Noto or Taylor Deupree, contemporary formations such as the Ensemble Modern, as well as his most recent solo works, in which he investigates the possibilities of orchestration and iteration by inserting electronically triggered aleatory and reacting to it during live performances, were a clear example of improvisation within compositional processes (see song: 2021113012). **(Albums: "Utp", "Summvs", "Dissaperance" & "12")**

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Other recordings and compositions analyzed while writing music for this particular project were: Fabian Almazan (*Alcanza Suite*), Trondheim Jazz Orchestra & Ole Morten (*Happy Endlings*), Tijn Wybenga & AM.Ok Jazz Orchestra (*Brainteaser*), Floating Points + Pharoah Sanders + London Symphony Orchestra (*Promises*), SFJazz Collective (*Original Compositions and Works by Thelonious Monk*), Michael Formanek & Ensemble Colossus (*The Distance*), John Hollenbeck (*Grids*), Charles Lloyd (*Trio of Trios*), Jakob Bro (*Uma Elmo*), Igor Stravinsky (*Symphony of Psalms*), Olivier Messiaen (*Turangalila Symphony & Quatour pour la Fin du Temps*), Boulez (*Repòns & Douze Notations Pour Piano*), Charles Yves (*Universe Symphony*), Marco Stroppa (*Miniature Estrose & Space*)...

### 7.1.3 Composition's Completion

The distinctive aspect of the writing process during this project was my purposeful effort, as a composer, to begin each working piece from an improvisational idea (see the 5.1 section of this thesis, pp.14). Whether that idea was going to be the focal point of the piece or just a contribution to the outcome, whether that improvisation was going to be more controlled or open, "it would be fantastic to have a piece of music which would have a basic character always, but by virtue of aspects of improvisation, the piece could take on subtly different kinds of character" (Earle Brown in Bailey 1980: 78).

Separated into eleven pieces, attempting to intertwine not just the music but also the conceptual narrative, I wrote the music as an entire concerto, called "*Ciudad Invisible*" (**dedicated to and inspired by those workers that are not often visible, those who have never been celebrated, yet nonetheless their invaluable contribution keeps everything going for everyone else**), in which, by incorporating improvisation as a structural component of the compositions, I aimed to intellectually challenge myself, to generate an external edge that would assist me avert my own artistic conservative nature, towards finding more freedom of expression, and to avoid falling into "a certain conservatism of form and language, that is found at the base of all commercial productions enthusiastically adopted by generations that claim to be anything but conservative" (Boulez & Foucault 1983-85: 204).

Through the implementation of recently acquired knowledge previously analyzed from the beforementioned artists, I expected to find a better balance between form and aleatory, while consciously excluding non-structural material, from the improvisational phase of compositions. As previously stated, the misconception that "free improvisation" is somehow connected to a purer way to spark spontaneity is at least misleading, even if sometimes this can be the case, elicit surprise does not correlate to non-structured musical works.

By doing so, I was aiming to produce a pre-constructed frame in which musicians and conductor can create or shatter consciously while improvising, hopefully without risk of disconnection and deceptive communication. "While some players improvise with great abandon, they nonetheless must respect both the limits of the genre and of the musical logic itself; otherwise, their performances lose intelligibility and become simply haphazard sequences of sound" (Gould and Keaton 2000: 146).

Theoretically, this will lead the music to a place where the amount of randomness and fluency will be intertwined with the performance, not just previously decided by the written work. A landscape also shaped by the interpreter's ability to deal with immediacy-related conditions.

Furthermore, I did not want to disregard the fact that there is always less communication friction within small bands, in comparison to large jazz ensembles, where is common that not everyone has the same amount of experience, language fluency, creative nuances or even

similar music backgrounds, making extremely difficult to replicate those interactive circumstances that help orchestrating the right balance for the improvisational iterations. "In jazz improvisation, we see the working out of a tension between individual and collective expression, between the unique and irreducible qualities of each individual musician and the need to respond to the other members of the ensemble." (Ramshaw 2006: 199)

#### **7.1.4 Rehearsal & Practice**

The concept of the "law of the singular event," by Derrida in (Ramshaw, S. 2006), which holds that events are never entirely predetermined or foreseeable because they are constantly subject to chance and contingency, is demonstrated through jazz improvisation, "it requires us to remain open to the unexpected and to be prepared to respond creatively to chance and contingency" (Ramshaw 2006: 202). Also, particularly similar to Hamilton's (2020) revisited theory of aesthetics of imperfection, and exactly what occurred during this project as the compositions were being rehearsed.

Not only did everyone have to deal with the group interactions and surprises brought on by the occasional uncertainty generated by the various improvisations that appeared during the pieces, or the chances of indeterminacy implicit in those singular events, but the musicians directly involved in the improvisational event itself had to be consciously aware of any eventuality that might emerge at the time, and there were a few.

While developing the project, I had the opportunity of performing and recording the music, for two different large jazz ensembles. Due to the limited rehearsal time, and the particularities of each event, we focused the energy on the fixated and notated parts on the charts, while also trying to prepare for the non-written parts that purposely intended to disrupt that fixation. Soloists were encouraged to exert their abilities of taking their individual parts further than collectively expected, bringing the pieces closer to unknown territory, while as a large ensemble, we embraced the idea of joining in those events collectively, both in terms of sound and energy.

The music was firstly presented in Oslo (Norway), at the NMH (Norwegian Academy of Music) in November 2022, with a large jazz ensemble formed by very talented musicians from both professional and student backgrounds.

For this occasion, we had three rehearsals prior the performance, and the formation lineup was: *2 trumpets, 1 trombone, 2 saxophones, bass and alto clarinet, bassoon, and a rhythm section formed by guitar, vibraphone, double bass, and drums.* We were also fortunate to have Geir Lysne as a conductor, who added a new and deeper interpretative layer to the music. Excelling at interpreting the collective aspect of the music and relieving the performers from the burden of music live organization, Geir significantly contributed to the improvisational and performative results of the pieces.

Secondly, taking the advantage of being temporary back in Madrid (Spain), aiming to find out similarities and differences in opposition to the Norwegian live performance experience, I organized another large jazz ensemble encounter, and made a studio recording of the same music at Camaleon Studios (February 2023).

For this instance, the ensemble was formed completely by professional musicians, and no conductor was involved in the process. We had a couple of days of preparation prior the

recording session, and the slightly more standard formation lineup was: *4 saxophones (alto, alto, tenor, bari)*, *3 brass (2 trombones and 1 trumpet)*, and rhythm section formed with *piano, guitar, bass, and drums*. Trying to achieve a similar level of musical communication, spontaneity, and interpretation flexibility that while having a conductor with the band, I precisely asked the musicians for contribution and feedback prior the rehearsals and recording session, in need of a deeper collective understanding of the music.

As expected, by trying to get artistic consensus between eleven professional musicians, the music took a noticeable different direction from here in opposition to the concert in Oslo. In some ways (mostly related to form and discourse fluidity), it was more controlled, in some ways rigid and less fresh, probably due to the complexity of the music and the collective aimed of interpretative accuracy, what is sort of habitual during recordings. Yet, and probably because the individual capacity of performers, and everyone's deeply consciousness about the music, improvisational structures ended being as diverse and spontaneous as the live concert.

As significant as any other part of the musical process that might be shaped during collective interpretations, variables unrelated to the rehearsal process but connected to individual practice, such as instrumental proficiency, professionalism, accuracy, or rigor, also contributed to the freedom of performance. Even though the compositions for both instances began the same, the final scores were slightly different by the start of the recording session in Madrid, in comparison to the Oslo version of the project.

### **7.1.5 Performance and performers feedback**

"The performance of a play, like that of a ritual, cannot simply be detached from the play itself, as if it were something that is not part of its essential being, but is as subjective and fluid as the aesthetic experiences in which it is experienced" (Gadamer 1989: 115).

Those instances in which interpreters bring music to life from written notation, cognitively dissecting the scores while reacting to whatever conditions may arise during this singular event, are how performance functions as a bridge between composition and improvisation practices, and why it is a necessary condition of music production. "To be open to the possibility of unexpected and unpredictable events, to resist the temptation to foreclose the meaning of a text, and to remain open to future possibilities that emerge in the course of improvisation" (Ramshaw 2006: 204). That is way, having the chance to perform the music composed for this specific project twice, with two independent ensembles, in two very different musical environments (professional and academic), was an essential aspect of the creative process, as well as a terrific opportunity to collect input from both musical worlds.

At this moment, my intention was to employ musical and commentary analysis to investigate the possibilities that improvisation as a structural component of the pieces may have brought into the interpreters' interactions, and Samsom's (1997) study, where he investigated free improvisation without predetermined parameters, while gathering recordings of duet performances seemed an adequate starting point for this section of my project.

Samson (1997) documented the artists' comments on their own performances and applied the qualitative data to content analysis by categorizing the participants' comments into themes, this served as the framework for a discussion of creativity and relationships in ensemble improvisation. Yet, since my compositions had structure, I needed to include that

parameter into the conversations before I could collect any data from the interpreters. They were encouraged to speak freely about the music while remembering that improvisation was always present during the songwriting process, meant as a structural aspect of the works, regardless of how loose or rigid the overall framework of the music turned out to be.

Following the performance in Oslo in November 2022 and the recording session in Madrid in February 2023, I asked for individual input from the interpreters in order for them to contribute as objectively as possible to shaping the performers viewpoint of this thesis. The data was informally collected, and not properly stored, so the following are just some of the general findings of those conversations:

- The most common feedback from the musicians in Madrid was that even considering the music had the fabric to be able to offer an open improvisational environment. Due to the complexity of the written parts of the pieces and the limited rehearsal time, we could not achieve that sort of interpretative freedom during our recording session, making the improvisation fell into a secondary aspect of the recording.
- Another general thought was that the music was honest and coherent with the way I understand the improvisation. A commentary inevitably attached to the fact that those musicians previously knew me as a performer and improviser.
- In reference to orchestration and instrumentation, some of them felt that the way that some voices were written/used within the counterpoint parts of the pieces was intriguing, far apart from each other, on the limits of instrument register and somehow harmonically disconnected. That felt like I was trying to provoke a sensation of improvised melody, a sort of written feeling of improvisation.
- The overall sensation of the concert, including written and improvised sections of the music, was frequently cited as evidence that it was carefully planned and not left to chance.
- Some commented the need for a specific musician profile, one that can and is willing to improvise.
- At the same time, some interpreters expressed that the project was well balanced between determined and indetermined aspects of music production, such as: complexity, sophistication, fixation, creativity, spontaneity, and flexibility.
- Others expressed, that the conscious choice to deliberately relinquish absolute control of the work's outcome, by leaving certain musical aspects on the hand of chance and the musicality of the performers, in favor of something musically organic and natural, was a main feature of the concerto

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- Similarly, musicians from the performance in Oslo said that it was a challenge to play some of the intricate pieces, both individually and collectively as an ensemble.
  - One generalized comment, was that the presence of a conductor, specifically helping with all transitions, different interludes, and the overall improvisational sections of the concert, was the right choice considering the difficulty of the music and the limited time of preparation that was available.
  - Some musicians felt that improvisations could have been better integrated into the pieces, and by that, meaning using current sections or structures from the written pieces to generate improvisational instances, aiming to achieve a more cohesive

outcome, in opposition to a more disrupting or transitional use of improvisation, what they felt as individual entities, and somehow disconnected from the music.

- In the other hand, others suggested that the fact that the traditional form common in jazz: 'Melody-Solos-Melody', was absent from the music, made the soloing section felt planned, and in that way, it helped creating space for the individual expression of every instrument and musician.
- Another common observation was that the music appeared to be written in a way that provided the musicians a lot of freedom, having in mind that the compositions could go in any direction, and it would still be alright. What helped providing room to constructively discuss and acceptance of new ideas and adjustments.
- Alongside, some expressed how inclusive and friendly the practicing process was.
- As in Madrid, a main observation was the need for a specific musician profile. One that can deal with some notated uncertainty, that is willing to take the responsibility that comes within improvisation and creative individuality.
- Lastly, one specific and very important feedback was related to the lack of detailed quality of the main scores, in opposition to the individual charts. What obviously curtailed the conductor's ability to perform, and his contribution to the overall performance.

In contrast to Samsom's several recordings, I only had the opportunity to record and perform once, which presumably implies that there is insufficient evidence to make conclusive assertions, but it should provide a preview of probable future outcomes. Nevertheless, I intended to do an interview with the performers and ask them specific questions, such as: A) did you feel that the improvisation of the pieces, was integrated within the music and held the structure of the compositions regardless of the randomness that they might have created? And B) as a performer, how the music felt in comparison to more standard approaches for large jazz ensembles that you could have experienced before?... Yet, once again, the length of the project precluded more in-depth conversations.

## 8.1 WORK PIECES

For this thesis, I will delve briefly into the intricate details of the Norwegian version of the music, a live performance that only includes eight of the eleven movements of the whole concerto, excluding three pieces written specifically for the musicians who participated in the recording session in Spain.

All eight of those songs were performed by both ensembles, and despite the distinct differences between the conditions of a live performance event and a recording studio session, as well as the unique nuances that affect the music and must be considered when analyzing both projects, such as personnel aspirations, musicianship, instrumentation, or musical fluency, I had the chance to compare and gather information from both settings.

The recording session in Madrid resulted in a more refined and likely professionally alluring final product, leading to the realization that the specific orchestration was probably more appropriate for this music, whereas the concert in NMH provided an environment in which I believe I got closer to the goal of eliciting a specific music energy, by convincing flexibility of interpretation while incorporating various types of improvisation to the pieces, trying as well not to lose the overall structured narrative of the concert compositions. Perhaps



the fact that we had a conductor with impressive communication skills and remarkable experience made the difference for the Oslo live performance, allowing us to foster a more open and participatory environment.

Finally, as compositional techniques gather from previously analyzed works, and none related to improvisation, I used different time signatures, irregular signature structures, tonal and atonal counterpoint, vertical and horizontal harmonic layers, odd meters, modal exchanges, and occasionally polyrhythmic and polytonality.

### 1. AWAKENING GIANTS (for early morning workers)

*Standard improvisation around irregular time signatures and bar structure*

First song of the concert, divided in 4 sections (Intro, Head In, Improvisation Interlude & Head Out), that are meant to set the atmosphere to build from. The main improvisational first thought here was having a sort of standard improvisation in the middle of the piece, based on music parameters that already appeared in the song, an asymmetrical bar structure, aiming to release some of the tension that is being built till this point of the piece. This is a kind of common improvisation for these sort of formations (Guillermo Klein & Los Guachos are a clear example of this), whereby reducing the participants on the actual improvisation to three or four, while keeping the direction of the music intact, you give everyone else a moment for a brake, as well as enlighten the main soloist. It works as a transition, and the aim is that it should be seamless, not abrupt, not sounding like an external idea that is being introduced without aesthetic criteria, just for the sake of it.

Secondary, during the intro, there are several improvise instances that are thought as sound scape possibilities, as how the drummer approaches the building of tension, or how the guitar generates a layer of white noise that helps with the interlaying of the piece.

### 2. PLEAMAR (for workers at the sea)

*Semi-structured free improvisation*

Second song of the concert, divided into 3 parts (Improvisation as Intro, Head, & Coda working as the Intro of the next piece). Starting from free individual improvisation alongside a conducted background. The solo settled at the biggining of the piece serves as seamless transition from the first to the second movement of the concert. The improviser does not have previous harmonic or rhythmic information about the solo, just the knowledge of time, that can be also modulated as pleased by the soloist or the conductor. There are background chords by the guitarist and written music from other winds happening while the improvisation is going, both with the particularity of not being fixated timewise, giving flexibility of interpretation.

The idea here is that the improviser should try to feet in what is happening around her or him. There is sound information and structure, regardless of it being more or less loose. The main melody of the piece starts at will, alongside the improviser, creating a multilayer sensation of polytonality, ending releasing that tension into a harmonically modal situation where the orchestration and form of the piece will become more standard, a consciously active way of improvisation that works perfectly as a transition between movements, as well as an introduction for the current piece.

### 3. TRASHUMANTES (for the immigrant workers)

*Harmonically open improvisation over a vamp based on odd meters*

Structured into 3 sections (Improvisation Intro, Head, & Abrupt Coda). The third movement is based on odd meters: a 5/8, within a 6/4, within a 4/2 improvisation vamp that evolved into a 5/8 within a 7/4, within a 5/2 piece. Yes, here the improvisational idea is completely inspired on rhythm. A bass line that navigates between all those irregular signature bars, at the same time a written pattern helping to generate a coherent sound and form, where the information for the improvisers is convey from the change of energy of the vamp in opposition to the previous

song. Hopefully, finding a structured freedom, or in other words, controlled improvisation that served as the starting point of the composition process that gave me enough information to generate a whole modal piece.

#### 4. KONZU 'where the dragon lives' (workers personal space, where we all go when being alone)

*Conducted & collective improvisation*

The structure here is separated into 3 instances (Collective Improvisation Intro, Head, Coda). Working as a chance to breath, to introduce a calmer momentum, at least for a second, an opportunity for me to explore collectively conducted improvisation.

Small information was given to all participants in regard to the improvisation. No rhythm section, no time signature, or harmonic indications, just a motive with a dozen notes on it, and not any other instruction. The conductor proposed in this occasion, to use only those notes that formed the motive as a harmonic background, comping the free improvisation of two soloists, answering each other, and reacting to the harmonies generated by the other interpreters, that while being conducted, could chose to play freely any note from the given motive.

In a way, the conductor is the interpreter and the winds the instrument, with the particularity that not everything was decided by the conductor. From here on, the song evolved into a eight bar regular structure, with an multilayer modal harmony on a loop, that helped convey the sensation of calm by repetition.

#### 5. LOS SEMAFOROS SON PERSONAS 'traffic lights are people' (that space that we all need to let lose some steam)

*Improvisation over a closed irregular and modal structure*

5<sup>th</sup> movement, divide into (Intro, Head In, Improvisation on the same structure of the main Theme, Head Out & Intro as Coda). The bass line written for the solo generates a structure, an amalgama based on a 5/4 signature, in which the song is vertically built afterwards, as pop songs usually do.

Here the interesting part is that the *solo*, the *head in and out* of the song, alongside every other section, is organized over the same eleven bar irregular harmonic structure. Thought, as a change of energy from the previous movement, as burst of energy, everything is there from the beginning, and the challenge here is to be able to abstract ourselves from what is given in the score and try to elicit and release tension with parameters that are not determine in the piece.

#### 6. ARGOS 'timelapse' (workers nostalgia, for those seeking a better situation)

*None structured free improvisation - performer interpretation*

The structure here is just the conception of a whole piece that serves as an interlude between movements. A short song, based on a modal bass line that evolve harmonically, resolving in a hopefully tense situation

The main improvisational idea was having a musician playing completely free, yet again I do not mean that in the sense of playing without notion of what is around, or any structures. More in the way that there is no information given to the soloist, neither instruction, further than that you can play as you pleased, but considering that a whole song is happening while you improvise, and in a way, you should enhance what is there, or break it, or at least react to it, do not ignore it.

I was pleased with the possibility of providing a pinch of anarchy, represented in one small part of the ensemble. While I considered the instrumentation contrast that I was inducing by giving freedom to a percussionist, in obvious opposition to the harmonic counterpoint that was happening in the piece, I wanted to say: you are the soloist, you may choose how to play or not play at all, do as you please.

#### 7. ODD MATTERS (an ode to the extravagances that make us all unique)

*Standard jazz improvisation over a closed irregular structured*

Almost the end, of the whole concert, this 7<sup>th</sup> piece is structured in 7 sections (Head In, Interlude I, Open Improvisation on the form, Interlude II, Head Out, Interlude III or Coda). Where again, thinking on using an irregular structure, where modal exchanges could produce an interesting improvisation option, I made this 33-bar form, built by polytonic melodic layers, that follows a bass line that resembles to be the main melody.

In this occasion, the time signature was regular, while harmony and structure were not. The energy came more from the intricated melody than from the form itself, trying to find a balance between orchestration equilibrium and rhythmic excitement. The closest piece of the whole concert to a standard way of using orchestration for large jazz ensembles, or big bands, where melody, harmony and rhythm were equally important.

## 8. BAJAMAR (an ode to the workers well-deserved rest)

*Improvisation conducted by the soloist – performer interpretation*

Last piece, divided in 2 clear parts (Intro & Head Out). A small harmonic counterpoint that leads into a final melody, where only one interpreter will have the opportunity of performing the main melody as she or he please. A piece resembling an *Outro*, a coda fulfilled with a spontaneous interpretation

No timeline for the soloist's performance, no indication more than what is written for the comping of the rhythm section, just the option of playing or break the melodic sound, or the rhythmic's of it, or play the same melody 300 times... By attempting to create a place for improvisation where no specialized characteristics are necessarily required from the improviser to be able to interact and transmit their desired energy, I aim to reinforce the idea of freedom within structure.

### 8.1.2 Limitations

Due to general restraints such as: scarce rehearsal time, production deadlines, formation size and sometimes doubtful scores clarity, both interpretations of the project had their constraints. It seems evident now that the music I composed would have been better suited for a more standard jazz ensemble orchestration, where the timber and volume of the wind instruments are better aligned to one another, helping to intertwine the overall sound alongside the rhythm section. Independently of the usage of electronic amplification afterwards, it would have been prudent to consider beforehand how the balance of instrumentation may acoustically shape the performative activities.

Also, to provide sufficient mental space to be able to pursuit a collective tone, as well as embracing the individual performative and improvisational capabilities of the musicians, it would have been helpful to priorly considerer the difficulty of the pieces, as well as the musicianship of the interpreters. Yet again, the limitations of production time are large, and without conductor's participation, or other composers' contributions, I would have need to multiply myself to be able to provide a better suited environment for each ensemble.

Nevertheless, noticing that the balance of the band will unavoidably be affected by all previously mentioned, and that the complexity of the music should be just a parameter of the music, nor an inconvenience; offering as clear as possible written instructions to allow musician's ability to properly perform must be taken in consideration while writing.

Following, it would have been beneficial to employ an assortment of methods to collect data from the whole process. Interview the artists and the audience to construct a more thorough picture of the phenomenon, where the knowledge obtained via music analysis and commentary would have better informed the qualitative data gathered in the phenomenological interview, allowing me to influence the conversation and probe it more meaningfully during data collection. In turn, the information gathered from the interview might have provide a more sophisticated perspective of the music and comments analyzed.

Unfortunately, due to the second portion of the analytical procedure was lengthy to implement, my views towards communication with audience and conveying energy using improvisation as a tool of compositions, without the data recall from the necessary interviews,

seems to be too subjective, and further investigation on the matter will be required to propel any proper conclusion.

Despite the difficulties to establish coherence into a work when, by introducing improvisational factors you are implementing unpredictability; or the time constraints of a dissertation that may end in a lack of broader data collection; the musicians' positive reactions to the composed music, towards an organized musical environment that embraces both individuality and collective creativity, made me believe that I am into the right path to find a better balance of employing improvisation as a structural way of composition without upending the foundations of written works, while still providing a room for experimentation. Yet, I am not totally pleased with my idea-delivery as a composer; the potential for developing a better setting for improvisation within composition need to be further explored.

### **9.1 FUTURE IMPLICATIONS & EDUCATIONAL POSIBILITIES**

Artistically and aesthetically, I am looking forward to professionally extend this project around the idea of circular music creation. And by that, I mean that I aim to continue producing, performing, and recording music for large ensembles, but also want to involve other creators in the process. Artists who will step in by remixing the existing pieces, which will be transcribe back with the purpose of perform and recording the newly elicited creations. A circular and creative process that hopefully strengthen the idea that improvisation, performance, and composition are all extensions of one another.

At the same time, it appears that I have embarked on a massive task, luring me into the academic world, with the hope of gaining some critical knowledge about how to implant a new, embracing, and appealing methodology for composition and further education, in which all musical practices are cohesively organized around each other, learning from each other.

With the wealth of knowledge, society presently possess about music, it seems either naive or rude that still nowadays, so many individuals sought to artificially characterize several music practices as opposites that are better or worse than one another. "Why should we choose to focus on one aspect of the music spectrum or another, you can make the same mistakes either way" (Ornette Coleman as in *Burning Ambulance* 2022). For what, as future research, and with the aim of disrupting that outdated musical perspective, it seems appropriate to compile a thorough compendium of improvisational techniques and methodologies that could be used as a structural component of composition.

What hopefully, after thoroughly precise investigation and practical application, will lead my work into the possibility of using this newly acquire knowledge to subsequently create a more inclusive and open educational model. One less based on artificial music styles, genres, competitiveness, or the celebration of superiority rather than the exploration of our differences.

Improvisation has historically been a part of Western Classical Music, but it has been largely excluded from higher education curricula in recent decades, disregarding enhanced musicality and creativity, increased engagement and motivation, and better preparation for professional careers in music as potential benefits for the students (Lebler 2010). Till the point where nowadays, improvisation appears as an overlooked activity both in music education contexts

and in music education research. Categorized, within music education research, as two conceptual and not very refined frameworks, each with differing implementation implications: 'structured', teacher-directed improvisation and 'free', child-directed improvisation (Larsson & Hemming's 2019), as if those vague and oversimplify structures were the only two options for introducing improvisation as a methodological part of the learning process.

Despite that Larsson & Hemming's interpretation about the current underdeveloped academic situation for children may be quite precise, and that the challenges of incorporating improvisation into musical higher education, such as: lack of training among faculty members and lack of resources and support for students (Lebler 2010) may be discouraging. I intend to investigate the advantages of using the previously assembled compendium of improvisational forms, approaches, and styles in assisting students with a certain level of musical competence, to develop their musical awareness, versatility, flexibility, thoughtfulness, kindness, fluency, and the ability to consciously explore rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic materials, as a method of educational music-continuous-development.

## 10.1 CONCLUSION

By examining both, improvisation, and composition as opposing categories, as well as a more refined view of their interconnected natures, I was aiming to give some clarity towards how improvisation can be used as a method of composition.

Even though I was not particularly interested in addressing to what extend improvisation is a form of composition or not, just without the luxury of time to choose and conceal your own understandings of imperfections, nor if improvisation constitutes a 'work' understood as the Platonist do; a written work, one that can be repeated (Kivy 1987). I realized that providing historical context for exploration was just as vital as having an appropriate structure for performance and improvisation. From what it seemed adequate to devote as much attention as possible to that section of the project, rather than only settling on choices concerning my compositions artistic research.

Despite that the findings of this thesis, regarding the data gathered from interpreters and other composers, might have been quite inconclusive, due primarily to a lack of time to proceed with phenomenological interviewing on top of music analysis and commentary analysis, which are inherently subjective tasks. The practical attempt of incorporating improvisation as a structural section of the composition process for large jazz ensemble has been a widely positive experience, allowing me to contribute to the growth of my own works by recognizing the value of improvisation in delivering spontaneity and surprise, rather than attempting to over-control the outcome.

In terms of real-world implementation of the knowledge acquired during the music writing processes, and the performative events in Oslo and Madrid, five major creative components to consider before applying improvisation as a structural methodology for composition became apparent. **a)** The importance of preestablishing musical structures when in search for individual and collective spontaneous input, **b)** the relevance of considering music complexity and musicians proficiency beforehand, as a factor that will influence rehearsal, performance and recording time optimization. Additionally, after analyzing the performances and performers' artistic feedback, and acknowledging there is a variety of legitimate artistic

pathways that can lead to similar musical outcomes, **c**) collective musical consensus may be just an idealistic aspiration, an aesthetic feature that conveys more issues than solutions.

Following, giving the extra difficulty towards orchestration added by the formation size and the diverse music capacities within a large ensemble, the amount of energy expended to play the notated sections of the compositions may have limited the opportunity to fully explore the creative possibilities provided by the improvisational sections of the music. Making clear **d**) to appreciate the significance of being able to deliver very detailed and specific information within a notated score, assisting interpreters to understand the broad concept of what is required, as well as avoiding losing precious creative energy by doing so. To approach written music aspects of the composition as if it would be always like “projecting your imagination into a situation you are not going to be present in (Earle Brown in Bailey 1980: 80). Finally, **e**) the figure of a conductor emerged as an invaluable option for musical fluency and improvisational collective coherence.

As a summary, and being conscious about the subjectivity of such a task, my main objective was to provide a foundation from which we can understand how artistically important is to have the option to employ improvisation as a method of composition, not just as a embellishment or a disconnected ornamentation of the music, but a distinctive feature of compositions for large jazz ensembles. One that help musicians “navigate a range of virtual possibilities in real-time, to respond to the sonic environment and to each other’s gestures and intentions” (Bertinetto’s 2013: 85), one that may assist gathering a deeper practical comprehension of music’s broader concepts—such as performance, composition, and improvisation, that will avoid the limitations that come with an over controlled style of composition that does not embrace the possibilities of chance. After all, “it would be wrong to give the impression that improvisers and composers are in two mutually uncomprehending camps; this no longer reflects the situation on the ground” (Hamilton 2000: 195).

Moreover, once every aspect of the music-making process has been intertwined, my intention is to use the knowledge to develop a more inclusive and open educational model; one that allows us to celebrate our differences as artists, less based on sections and genres, competitiveness, or the celebration of superiority rather than the exploration of our differences, while also collaborating on each other's creations without the aesthetic preconceptions and social status barriers that have only stifled cultural advancement. Will require a plethora of further investigations, such as: implications of pluri-cultural educational models, monetization, and work opportunities within musical practices.

In addition, I would like to comment on my regret of not have been able to create a visual retrospective of the workers who inspired me during the compositional process. Telling their experiences not just musically, but also aesthetically, in the hopes of enlightening them while providing an immersive experience for the audience, was part of my intended way of “broaden our knowledge and understanding through original investigation” (Borgdorff’s 2007: 12). Yet, due to the length of this thesis, I could not interview enough participants to conduct proper qualitative research on how this work may influence them retrospectively. So, although, I feel I am about to embark on a lifelong endeavor, with this dissertation serving as the first steps towards finding more appropriate answer to my artistic practice, I will hopefully find time to fulfil this last task in the future.

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